

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

F-15E, S/N 88-1701

SEYMOUR JOHNSON AIR FORCE BASE, NORTH CAROLINA

6 MAY 2004

On 6 May 2004, 1708L (2108Z) the mishap aircraft (MA) an F-15E, S/N 88-1701, call sign Kong 42, crashed in a field near Callaway, Virginia. The MA, assigned to the 4th Fighter Wing, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, North Carolina, was participating in a two-ship Surface Attack Tactics (SAT) mission along Military Training Route VR-1752. The mishap crew (MC) had completed the simulated delivery of Precision Guided Munitions (PGM) when a large Black Vulture struck the number two (right) engine at approximately 700 feet above ground level (AGL). The MA caught fire and the mishap pilot (MP) was unable to maintain controlled flight. The MP and mishap weapon systems officer (MW), both assigned to the 335th Fighter Squadron, ejected without injury and were recovered by local law enforcement officials and civilians. The aircraft was destroyed on ground impact in a field near two residences. There were no casualties on the ground; however, some property damage occurred due to mishap debris and resulting fires. Damage to the aircraft is estimated at \$42,391,559.86.

During a low-level rejoin with the lead aircraft, Kong 41, the MP saw a black object flash by in his peripheral vision. Both the MP and MW heard two impacts and an explosion on the right side of the MA. The MP initiated a climb and notified Kong 41 that he had struck a bird. The MA began to roll to the right, which the MP was able to minimize by using up to full left rudder and aileron inputs and reducing power on the left engine. There were no fire lights or audible fire warnings in the cockpit. Both Kong 41 crewmembers could see the right engine of the MA was on fire and radioed this to the MC. The MP discharged the fire suppression system and shut down the right engine. The aircraft continued in a climbing right turn, and when the MP relaxed aileron and rudder pressure, the MA entered an uncommanded right roll to an inverted attitude. The MP allowed the roll to continue upright and then applied full stick and rudder inputs to maintain a slight right bank. By this time, the flames had diminished; however, the MC determined they could not control the MA any longer and initiated ejection while the MA was in an upright attitude.

The cause of this mishap, supported by clear and convincing evidence, was a bird strike, which led to a catastrophic failure of the number two engine due to the ingestion of a large Black Vulture. The impact resulted in an uncontained disintegration of fan, compressor and turbine blades and caused a major aircraft fire. Two additional factors, supported by substantial evidence, contributed to the mishap. First, there was a loss of sufficient capability to maintain controlled flight due to severed flight control cables and wiring harnesses, and hydraulic system failures. Second, the flight was not in compliance with restrictions in the Seymour Johnson AFB Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard Plan.

Under 10 U.S.C. § 2254(d), any opinion of the accident investigators as to the cause of, or the factors contributing to, the accident set forth in the accident investigation report may not be considered as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding arising from the accident, nor may such information be considered an admission of liability by the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.